

Under reconstruction! We apologize for the absence of certain materials.

AN ORANGE INSTANT BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

30 December 2004

As a popular song goes, life is an instant between the past and the future. Today this life is orange, although different people will define it differently: some as a revolution, others as a putsch. Some will view the people in Maidan as a nation, others - as a crowd.

Yet the New Year will come to all of us. Candles will be flickering. The night will fall onto towns and the countryside. Christmas trees will be in their places and the clocks will chime on time. Leonid Kuchma will greet us as usual. Everything will be fine.

And everything will be different than before.

It is not that bad guys in power will be gone for good, replaced with nice guys. It is us who will not, cannot, be the same.

What will it be like? The Sociological Service of the Razumkov Centre, exhausted with elections and exit-polls, has nevertheless surveyed our countrymen and countrywomen with regard to their thoughts and feelings about the passing year. The following are their summarized comments on different topics.

On the New Year

Notwithstanding the revolution, people are still looking forward to the New Year holidays. It is a favorite festivity, traditionally celebrated with family. It is also a bit of a strange holiday, since we traditionally celebrate it twice (on the 1st and 14th of January). As before, seven people out of a hundred see it as a holiday for kids, five out of a hundred - as a reminder that life is transient, three out of a hundred - as just another day off. As a year ago, two people out of a hundred will feel lonely, regardless of the universal merrymaking and glee, and that is sad.

Most of us (72%) will be celebrating the holiday at home, every second - because we believe it to be a family reunion time; every seventh (14%) - because we cannot afford anything else.

However, 17 people out of a hundred (versus 11 last year) will be visiting with their friends or relatives; two out of a hundred (versus one last year) will go to a restaurant, cafe, disco or night club to celebrate there.

Is it a desire to share joy with others that was born in Maidan? It could be. Maidan could also account for the remarkable generosity of planned New Year gifts. Peoples' incomes have not grown dramatically (see below), nor have prices for the usual assortment of gifts (sweets, champagne, perfumes, knick-knacks). However, the average amount that we are prepared to spend on gifts has doubled, going from UAH 71 last year up to UAH 139 this year.

It is worth mentioning, *en passant*, that Ukrainian citizens transferred UAH 20 million to an account opened in support of the Maidan rally participants.

On events and politicians of the year

Unlike the uneventful and dull 2003, this year will be remembered by our compatriots. Whereas last year 55% of respondents did not notice any thrilling episodes, this year only two out of a thousand have been so inattentive.

According to the people polled, the greatest events of the year were the presidential elections (62%) and their derivative, the orange revolution (26%). A crucial event for both the outgoing and the newly-elected authorities - political or constitutional reform - does not seem to have impressed the citizens (as few as 0.9% of respondents picked it as the event of the year).

Viktor Yushchenko has consolidated his position as politician of the year: twice as many people as last year cited his name in answering this question (39% versus 18%). Viktor Yanukovych is the second most popular politician, with 27%, although a year ago his rating was three times as low (9%). Volodymyr Lytvyn, who was not even included in last year's list, runs third. Olexander Moroz and Yuliya Tymoshenko conclude the top five, with 3% each. Leonid Kuchma ranked sixth (2%). Heralds of the revolution (Mykola Tomenko, Olexander Zinchenko) and counterrevolutionaries (Nestor Shufrych, Stepan Havrysh) got 0.1%. Every seventh respondent failed to distinguish a worthy politician (14%), while last year this indicator amounted to 30%.

At the same time Ukrainian events and politicians have got into the spotlight in many a faraway land. Journalists of the foreign media, who used to be unable to tell the country from Russia or Uganda, have finally found it on the map - to their great surprise, it turned out to be located in Europe.

It also turned out that Ukraine is not Russia. Yet it was not due to Leonid Kuchma's book but, rather, to the people in Maidan that the world has come to understand it.

The Polish *Wprost* weekly declared Viktor Yushchenko the man of the year for his contribution to "the revival of a civil movement for democracy and true patriotism devoid of a nationalistic edge, for coping with the extremely difficult task of leading a bloodless revolution and for bringing Ukraine back to Europe." The American *Time* magazine placed his name first on the list of foreigners who have been of particular significance for the USA.

Our fellow-citizens were fairly modest in assessing the elections and the revolution that followed in terms of their global impact. Only 17% of respondents considered the elections to be an internationally notable event; another 11% appreciated the worldwide value of the orange revolution.

On gratefulness

Leaving big politics on the crest of success and popularity is what every politician dreams of... So, in principle, it makes me happy.

Leonid Kuchma's interview with the "Epicenter", 14 November 2004

Now, for the outgoing President. On the tenth anniversary of his tenure, Leonid Kuchma announced he was leaving office "on the crest of success." His cronies joined in, claiming that but for Kuchma there would have been no Maidan and that he devoted all his life to the wellbeing of the country. They appealed to history for a fair judgment of the Kuchma era.

As for the people's judgment, opinions differ. By and large, the citizens are not at all enthusiastic about the President's performance, nor about the heritage he is leaving behind. Their assessment ranges between "poor" and "very poor." Only 7% evaluated Kuchma's efforts to secure high standards of living for the nation positively, while 61% have a negative opinion about it.

As for Kuchma's economic policy, 15% of respondents estimated it as positive, and 45% (three times as many!) as negative; his social policy satisfied 13% of the population, and made 39% (three times as many again!) unhappy. Leonid Kuchma can regard his performance in inter-ethnic and foreign policies as an asset, where positive assessments prevail, albeit slightly (8% and 5%, respectively).

The citizens are especially discontent with the corruption and crime rate characteristic of the Kuchma reign. The Constitution guarantor's "hard" fight with these adverse phenomena was assessed as "very poor" (72% in respect of corruption and 71% vis-a-vis crime). A little over 3% think the President delivered on combating crime (0.4% assessed his performance in this field as "very good" and another 3% as "good").

Summing up, 14% of Ukrainians evaluated Leonid Kuchma's ten years in office positively, 49% negatively and 33% are ambivalent. As of mid-December, 5% of respondents fully supported his activities, 22% supported only some of his acts, while 69% denied him any support whatsoever.

Our citizens are not appreciative of Kuchma, but also are not vindictive: 48% of respondents believe he should retire from active political and public life, 16% think he could engage in some civil activities, 8% would give him a chance to remain in politics, while 13% insist he should be brought to trial.

Since the dawn of his tenure, Leonid Kuchma has managed to lose whatever little respect from his fellow-citizens that he used to have. Whereas in July 15% of respondents thought positively of him, in December this number reduced to 8%, and the negative attitude rate grew from 47% to 62%. Even the number of people indifferent to the President dropped from 32% in June to 26% in December. I would not call it a desire to hit the man when he is down. The matter is that over the last few months, according to the people surveyed, Kuchma was more preoccupied with safeguarding his own interests or those of his entourage (76%) than caring about national interests (12%). There is one thing, though, for which we should be thankful to the Constitution guarantor: he did not follow his advisors' recommendations to use force against the demonstrators. It does not matter whether he was guided by fear or principle. What matters is that blood was not shed.

Finally, how is Leonid Kuchma completing his two terms in office?

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As a person who has retained his authority and respect with the public - 8%.

As an mediocre politician - 36%.

As a person in disgrace - 45%.

On beliefs and daily bread

The symbols of freedom and social justice, market economy and democracy have acquired true meaning having overshadowed basic material needs in the hierarchy of values. People have come to believe they can change their lives and their country for the better.

The press, December 2004

We have believed in many good things. Thirteen years ago we believed we could be happy and prosperous in an independent Ukraine, once we got rid of the Soviet Union. Five years later we believed a new democratic Constitution would help us improve our lives. All was in vain.

Now many believe - and even more want to make others believe - that the victory is ours. The bad guys are leaving, *actum est illicet* - we have accomplished our cause, we can go home.

I do not know in which hierarchy of values basic material needs recede to the background, but I am positive that freedom, social justice and all other characteristics of a market economy and democracy cannot exist without a civil society and rule of law. A civil society, in its turn, cannot be formed without a strong middle class.

The middle class is made up of people whose basic needs are satisfied in an effective and sustainable manner for years to come. Satisfied needs bring about savings or investments in the national economy, and guarantees of personal freedom and independence from the arbitrariness of the wealthy and the mighty as far as the individual is concerned. Those individuals should represent the majority of society. Only then will they be able to play their appropriate roles as partners to the government and as a social client and supervisor to public administration bodies.

Officially, the middle class is present in our country. As a year ago, 58% of respondents referred to themselves as the middle class, and another 36% as the lower class. Something has happened to the upper class, though. It has shrunk from 1% last year to 0.4% this year.

The overwhelming majority of the population polled (95%), including those who consider themselves as belonging to the middle class, do not think their basic needs are being met. They either have not enough money even for food (21%), or have incomes that cover only the official basket of goods (48%), or else earn a decent living but cannot afford the major "middle class" attributes such as durable goods (26%). Almost 4% admit they live well, but purchasing a car or a flat is still beyond their reach. Only three persons out of a thousand can buy whatever they want.

Hence the freedom, particularly of movement throughout the country with no car or flat, in search of a job. The government can abolish residence registration three times over, but that will not guarantee freedom of movement to a person who has no money to travel even to the closest administrative centre.

Hence the savings: 68% of citizens cannot earmark any funds for a rainy day; while 29% can do that. However, the saved amounts are too small, on average. Every other person (50%) has no savings, 23% have capital sufficient to keep them through one month, should they lose their jobs, and 2% will be able to live on their savings for a year. Is it the middle class that will make me believe in the "true meaning" of the symbols cited above? I do not think so.

It is not by accident that the revolution originated in Kyiv. It may be the only city in the country with a solid group of residents at least distantly reminiscent of the middle class. It may be one of the few cities in the country where life is not all about survival and where people, therefore, have time to think of democracy and personal freedom, in addition to their daily bread. Unless this space between living and survival emerges all over the country, we will have neither a civil society nor the rule of law. And the orange instant will not grow into our common future.

On swallows

By passing the law that sets the priority of paying salaries and wages, we are taking a step backwards, as we, practically, deprive enterprises of their financial freedom.

V.Pynzenyk, Kyiv-Weekly, 19 November 2004

Will the good guys who are coming to power do their best to foster a civil society and the middle class, their social client and supervisor? I am not sure.

For one thing, these guys are businessmen. So I wonder how they are going to apply the proclaimed principle of separating state power from private business. A businessman from the good guys' team has been recently reported as saying: "Ukraine needs a parliamentary republic, which is consonant with the mentality of the petty bourgeoisie. Yet for a parliamentary republic to be viable there should exist at least 10-12 clans that can never collude amongst themselves." Since I do not belong to a clan, I am of no consequence as a component of the petty bourgeoisie. "A very pleasant prospect. A most jolly outlook."

For another thing, swallows are in the sky, ready to make a summer. The first of them is manifested through the quotation above from one of the good guys. Do not get me wrong. I do not object to the financial freedom of enterprises. I am all for it, but why should it be achieved at the cost of my freedom and the only property that I have - my labour? Our domestic enterprises have not paid us salaries and wages for years, thus stripping us of an opportunity not only to grow into the middle class, but also to earn a decent living. Could the good guys want it to stay that way?

The second swallow is state-owned land (which means my land as well) from reserve areas around the capital city leased out almost for nothing. Who are the lessees? Who are the lessors?

The third swallow is taxation. Nobody is discussing "taxes for the rich." The tax on deposit interest has been put off till 2010. At the same time, small business and self-employed individuals who pay the flat tax will have to pay an additional 34% of their incomes to the pension fund.

The fourth swallow is the minimum wage of UAH 262 as envisioned in the 2005 state budget. It is UAH 25 more than last year, but given the projected 10% inflation, the rise is negligibly small.

There could be a whole flock of swallows, as we do not yet know what agreements have been reached or if they have been reached between the good and the bad guys.

The outgoing President re-appointed the prosecutor general dismissed earlier for lack of progress in a number of high-profile investigations, and appointed Stepan Havrysh to the Constitutional Court. Another bad guy from the old team promoted a police General, openly accused by his subordinates of criminal liaisons, to be president of a national police academy. Well - the good guys can dismiss them again, of course, but still.

Who or what has forced 146 delegates at a general meeting of a national law academy to elect a man who was exposed as a key actor in ballot-rigging as their president? Doesn't a lawyer, manager and educator need a reputation for honesty and professionalism?

We should stay alert to the fact that the Kuchma era is not over. Mediocre as he is, he will stay with us for quite a while. He has built and reinforced the present corrupt and criminal government system. And we will have to squeeze Kuchmism from the government and from our conscience, drop by drop.

A change of people in power does not necessarily mean its transformation. Perhaps the only victory we gained is that those in power have realized they are not invincible, they are not there to stay forever. The authorities can be replaced, if not reformed. And they can be replaced until they change, until they understand they are there to serve the people, not the other way round.

For this to happen we have to stay in Maidan. As soon as we go home - it will be the end of it.

On a New Year's Eve toast

I am optimistic, though, given that the good guys have to remember the 2004 elections, when we (the crowd or the nation, call us what you choose) go to vote again. As matters stand, it is a toss-up if our chief good guy gets a parliamentary majority. Besides, he has very little time - about eighteen months. A Ukrainian politician once said "two years is an eternity for a government." My president has a little less, so he still has a fair chance.

Of course, he will be facing a tremendous challenge; in a poor country no one can make everybody happy in one night, placate rebellious regions and re-unify the heterogeneous nation.

Of course, he will be facing a tremendous challenge; in a poor country no one can make everybody happy in one night, placate rebellious regions and re-unify the heterogeneous nation.

On the other hand, we have common problems, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion and even age. First and foremost, it is the law, equally binding for all. It is the right to live rather than survive. We have to urge the government to operate effectively. Sometimes that is more difficult than blocking its premises.

It is high time that we stop applauding one another, give up our perennial belief in a better life that comes automatically next morning and check ourselves when we are about to "freely" vote for something unacceptable.

Or shall we agree with the good guys that the tent camp will remain on stand-by, and that they will have to keep a picture of Maidan on their desks, next to their family photos?

I will drink a toast to this. May we hold on! Most of us have no capital, no savings, no other grounds to claim the honour of being called the middle class, civil society or petty bourgeoisie. Yet we have proven to ourselves that we are worthy people, that we can assist and support one another, that we deserve to be respected and reckoned with. Let us hold on!

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